

## United Europe – Yes, or No?

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Received: 2 June 2021 ▪ Accepted: 27 June 2021 ▪ Published Online: 28 June 2021

### *Abstract*

In recent years, the European Union has been facing a number of challenges that it is finding it increasingly difficult to overcome. Most EU member states are facing a crisis of confidence in Europe and its institutions, and at the same time nationalist political parties and ideas are developing more and more, leading to a weakening of European solidarity. Eastern European countries weakened awareness of the collective interest. The common values that existed until then have become “diluted”, because different understandings of the nature of the state have emerged, as well as different views on international politics. At the same time, support for European integration among citizens has been declining, and fewer and fewer have seen membership as good and can bring significant benefits. Today, the idea of a united EU is in crisis and that is precisely the cause of the crisis the Union is facing.

*Keywords:* European Union, idea, crisis.

### 1. Introduction

The idea of a united Europe has fascinated philosophers and visionaries for centuries. Among them were Pierre Dubois, Claude Henri de Saint-Simon, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Giuseppe Mazzini, Victor Hugo and Immanuel Kant. History tells us that the idea of a united Europe has taken on different characteristics over the centuries, depending on the political and cultural context. The Young Europe Movement (1834), the European Congress for Peace (1876), and the Pan-European Movement (1926) are just some of the movements of a united Europe throughout history. The period after the Second World War was also crucial, when Europe found itself divided into ideological blocs (capitalist and communist), and the United States, which has an important role in the unification of Europe, wanted to stop the spread of communism in Europe through various approaches. Thus, was implemented the American foreign policy plan to stop the spread of communism, the so-called Truman’s doctrine, which was later supplemented by the Marshall Plan or the European Renewal Plan.

This will apply only to some European countries, primarily Western Europe, while the rest will be covered by the Iron Curtain until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when the actual integration of Germany and the symbolic integration of the whole of Europe. The European Union is facing a great challenge and even the mantra proclaimed for years about unity and further integration has been called into question in order to overcome numerous weaknesses and ensure further development, prosperity and unity. Building a common European identity, the economic crisis, the euro crisis, the migration crisis, the consequent rise of right-wing populism and violations of basic EU values by countries like Hungary and Poland, Britain’s exit from the EU and

Brexit difficulties are weaknesses facing the EU? Unity and togetherness of the EU. The sustainability of the EU concept as such has been called into question and the need for changes in its operation is evident. The European Union is a project of unification of European nations with two main motives. The first is to establish stability and lasting peace in Europe through economic and political integration.

The second is the creation of a single, integrated market that will enable faster economic development (synergistically, individually and collectively) and thus strengthen Europe's role in the world economy. The idea of a united Europe has fascinated philosophers and visionaries for centuries. Proponent of the idea of European unification, the French writer Victor Hugo wrote in 1855: "Our continent will be a state of one people. There will be no borders, no customs, and no bans, there will be only the free movement of goods and people." And the solidarity of European peoples (Dedman, 2001). Back in 1929, the French Prime Minister Aristide Briand, at a session of the League of Nations, proposed the formation of a federation of European states for the purpose of economic progress and political and social cooperation. Politician Edouard Herriot published the book *United European States* in 1930, in order to draw the public's attention to the idea of European unification. However, its development was completely interrupted by the rise of Nazism in Germany which led to the beginning of World War II. After World War II, Winston Churchill called for the creation of a United States of Europe because he was convinced that only a united Europe could ensure peace. His goal was to eliminate once and for all the evil of nationalism and incitement to war in Europe (Dinan, 2010).

What began as an exclusively economic union, has evolved into an organization that encompasses many policy areas, from climate issues, environment and health to foreign affairs and security, and justice and migration, which is today the main argument of Eurosceptic when discussing the EU idea. Today, 70 years after its founding, the EU faces major challenges, from unemployment and economic stagnation to the refugee crisis and the fight against terrorism. It is facing threats from outside and inside, primarily because of the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, but also because the fundamental European idea of cooperation between the states is being questioned. Will Brexit be a hint of a trend of further disintegration of the EU and the collapse of its fundamental values, or an expensive test of EU ant fragility?

## 2. Economic interpretation / crisis analysis of the EU idea

The scientific paper "European citizen in times of crisis" (Samardžić & Milosavljenović, 2013) discusses the question of why European civil society has not emerged in the development of European integration so far. The author emphasizes that through several decades of development, a systemic integration of a number of areas of public life has been carried out, and starting from the common market all the way to monetary union, but that this process has not been accompanied by appropriate social integration. This issue is gaining in importance in today's time of crisis. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has published a report entitled "Europe stretched to the limit", which presents seven key problems that threaten the European Union in economic and political terms and that could lead to its collapse. The problems identified are: the UK referendum, Greek debt, monetary policy, declining productivity, tensions with Russia, party systems, the migrant crisis (-----, 2019).

The study entitled "What is a political union" (Dullien & Torreblanca, 2012) considers three choices about the type of political union that European leaders must make. The first choice is between a limited economic federation aimed at stabilizing the euro, and full economic integration that would take over traditional national and state tasks, such as taxes, social protection and redistribution. The second choice is between a rules-based federation with very little room for innovation and flexibility policy and a federation with large discretionary powers and policy instruments. The third choice is between a political system that relies on indirect

legitimacy, and which is mainly managed through interstate mechanisms, and a political system that relies on instruments of direct legitimacy and which gives great executive powers to supranational institutions such as the European Commission.

The report of the US Congressional Research Service “Europe Union: Current Challenges and Perspectives” states that the EU is currently facing a number of political and economic pressures, such as slow economic growth, high unemployment in many countries, and the rise of populist political parties. “Eurosceptic” feeling. These factors complicate the EU’s ability to address a multitude of internal and external challenges including: the Greek debt crisis, migration and the refugee crisis, the UK referendum on EU membership and the increased threat of terrorism (-----, n.d.a).

The study “Mapping Future Scenarios for the Eurozone” (Rodrigues, 2012) states that the eurozone is facing a systemic crisis with far-reaching consequences for the future of economic and monetary union, European integration and Europe. According to the study, four main scenarios are possible in the future: (1) Member States may continue to try to manage the crisis, which may lead to the break-up of monetary union; (2) the second variation leads to further reversal, which also affects political integration; (3) a specific combination of factors that can lead to a two-tier EU, with a small hard core of Member States; and (4) (part) of a Member State may terminate monetary union through fiscal and political union.

The study “Solidarity and Strength: the future of the EU” recognizes that solidarity and strength are becoming key concepts for the future of the EU. Without solidarity and cohesion, there is no capacity to act inside or outside the Union. The debt crisis has shown the need for increased coordination and integration, while support for a more united Union with increased solidarity is declining. Many citizens are under the impression that the new dimension of European integration involves much greater centralization and risk (-----, n.d.b.).

The published paper “The crisis of the management process in the EU – Does Jean Monnet’s method of integration survive” (Šmitran, 2016) takes the view that the model of integration promoted by Jean Monnet in the period after the outbreak of the systemic crisis in 2005 in the EU showed contradictory properties. The need for a fast and efficient decision-making system has marginalized the European Commission and highlighted the European Council as a key political institution. The Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, has further complicated the already complex policy-making and decision-making process within the EU. Due to the large divergences of the Member States in terms of further development of the Union, differentiated integration is imposed as a future dominant model of integration.

The scientific paper “Possibility of managing the EU institutional crisis” (Dabić, 2016) states that the crisis-induced dissatisfaction, both in terms of legitimacy and the performance of common European institutions, conditioned the need to undertake a more serious and far-reaching reform of the EU governance system. It is required that the decision-making process in the Union be made more efficient and democratic at the same time, which are two political values that are not at all easy to reconcile and achieve. The paper argues that the necessary institutional reform at Union level is largely hampered by the lack of legitimacy to carry it out. The current European elites have neither a clear political vision nor a determination to take measures that would make the governance system more democratically accountable to citizens.

De Witte and Heritier (2012) state that the economic crisis has erased the progress of European economies made in the years before the crisis. The stable economic growth and employment growth that characterized the decade before the crisis have disappeared. In conditions of growth and economic prosperity, the asymmetry of the EU and the Eurozone did not create major problems. However, the economic crisis in the EU had a more pronounced intensity and longer duration compared to the United States and unequal intensity in some EU member states. The crisis has revealed the EU’s fundamental weaknesses.

The European Union is facing a major challenge: how to ensure prosperous development in the future? The EU needs a higher degree of political and fiscal integration, greater investment in research and development to develop a knowledge-based and innovation-based economy, better education, higher employment and environmental protection. The Union needs to address its own weaknesses and secure new sources of strength through further integration.

### 3. Innovation of the European project as a basis for further integration

The economic crisis that spilled over into the EU from the United States in 2008 confirmed what was already obvious after the failed referendums and the failure to adopt a treaty on a constitution for Europe – and that is – that the Union has entered a new phase of integration, a crisis. The economic crisis has also revealed fundamental weaknesses and new challenges, as well as the need to further strengthen integration processes. The weakening and crisis of the euro as a currency has raised legitimate concerns about the future of the euro as a single currency. The single currency, designed to strengthen the unification of members, became a source of tension and a threat to the united EU during the financial crisis. The referendum for the United Kingdom's exit from the EU dealt a great blow to European unity and deepened the crisis.

The fear that a domino effect could be triggered among other EU members is justified. Currently, the Union is facing the largest uncontrolled influx of migrants, and the main flows of migration are directed towards highly developed countries and areas of the EU. There is also a high degree of dissatisfaction of European citizens due to the erosion of social rights, large social differences between individual member states as well as within the states themselves. All of the above, the economic crisis, the euro crisis, the referendum on the United Kingdom's exit, the migrant crisis, are the challenges facing the EU, while the main cause of the crisis is the idea of a single EU. The European Union has gone through a difficult and long path of integration, and the motives for integration were the growth of Europe into an integrated, single market that should enable faster economic development, as well as the establishment of lasting peace and stability. However, that idea of a united EU is in crisis today. Solidarity and cohesion as key principles in the functioning of the EU can and should be important principles in overcoming the current crisis. European countries must become aware of the importance of cooperation and solidarity and jointly develop a vision for future development. EU members need unity and further integration to overcome a number of existing weaknesses and ensure further development, prosperity and unity. According to European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker: "Solidarity is the glue that holds the Union together."

Today, EU member states no longer advocate a European project, but national programs, and in order to continue to function successfully, the EU needs a clear vision in which European values will once again take centre stage. It is necessary to forget the rivalry between competencies and institutions and work on strengthening unity and togetherness. The existential crisis the EU is facing is a crisis of the idea of a united EU. In his speech on the state of the Union in September 2016, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, stated that "the EU is, at least in part, in an existential crisis. So far I have not seen so much division and so little togetherness in the Union. It is up to us to make an important decision."

Will we succumb to an easily understood sense of frustration? Will we allow ourselves to fall into a collective depression? Do we want the Union to fall apart before our eyes? „In the past six decades, integration has progressed continuously, but it is wrong to conclude that there were no obstacles or obstacles in that period. The history of European integration is a history of crises and their overcoming by finding new solutions and new commitments of integration actors. If the EU wants to survive, it is necessary to overcome numerous challenges, create a common vision and define a new concept that will be based on European values. Future progress requires comprehensive and substantial changes that require the widest possible consensus among

member states, which will continue the process of transforming the European system of states into ever stronger unions of peoples. Europe's structural weaknesses are completely exposed.

Therefore, enhanced cooperation of economic policies in the euro area should ensure a successful global exit from the crisis (idea) of the European Union. The European Union must react in the near future to avoid its collapse. In this regard, we can draw a few lessons from the current situation: the 27 EU Member States are highly interdependent. Put simply, the crisis has highlighted close ties and spill overs between national economies, especially in the Eurozone. Reforms, or lack thereof, in one state affect the performance of all others, as recent events have proven. The crisis and severe constraints on public spending have made it difficult for some Member States to invest in the basic infrastructure they need in areas such as transport and energy, not only to develop their own economies but also to help them participate fully in the internal market.

Therefore, coordination within the EU should be crucial. In fact, the last ten years of developments in the EU have only shown and proved that no country alone can respond effectively to challenges:

- The EU will only influence global policy decisions if it works together. Stronger outward representation must be associated with stronger internal coordination.
- Europe is left with a clear but difficult choice – or will jointly face the immediate challenge of recovery and long-term challenges – globalization, resource pressures, “aging” – to make up for recent losses, restore competitiveness, boost productivity and put the EU on track. Progress (“sustainable recovery”). Or it will continue at a slow and largely uncoordinated pace with reforms, risking ending in permanent wealth loss, a sluggish growth rate (a “slow recovery”) that can lead to high unemployment and social misery, and a relative decline on the world stage (“lost decade”).
- The need for innovation, deregulation with integration, which is a paradox. Strengthening Taleb's ant fragility, unified decentralization, etc.

#### Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The authors declare no competing interests.

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